

Weekly Teaching

March 22, 2019

The core ideas within the Book of Leviticus are the Holy nature of God and God's desire for the Israelites to be Holy too.

The two repeated biblical phrases "I am the Lord" and "I am Holy" are used over 50 times within Leviticus.

It's within the parameters of Holiness that God commands specific obligations by which we achieve the goals of sacred living.

Also, it's within this same context of Holiness that the ancient Israelite priests are commanded their required obligations.

God tells Moses: "Command Aaron and his sons thus..."

Rabbinic commentary notes that the expression "command" means a sacred action that is to be carried out immediately, and is binding for all future generations.

Aaron was the first priest (Cohen), and all of his descendants are considered the priests (Cohenim) for all generations; the priesthood was given to him and his offspring for all time.

The status of "priest/cohen" is the only hereditary position of authority, a genetic gift of a particular religious status.

Any Jew could become a King, Queen, Prophet, Leader, etc. However, only the priest/cohen status can be acquired if one's father also had this "by-birth" status.

Even the mediocre priest still had his sacred obligations. As the Talmud teaches: *"when the priest presented the ritual for the sacrificial service on Yom Kippur, if he was able he would provide a sermon. However, if not, the rabbis would give a sermon in his presence. If the priest was well-versed in reading then he would read, but, if not, others would read in his presence."*

Throughout Jewish history there were priests who were not educated, and were mediocre in both their talents and wisdom.

But God's commandment was never altered; never transferred to others.

Yet there was an ever-present concern.

Priests might be non-talented in their ritual capabilities, however, if they failed in their obligations of leading a holy life, they were in fact to be prohibited from taking part in Temple ritual life.

A non-priest cannot substitute for the priest in duties, but the priest could be forbidden from their ability to act on the inherited priestly status.

If there is a grievous immoral act, the priest can potentially lose his own ability to perform priestly duties, and even also his future descendants can lose the same ability to perform sacred priestly tasks: *"no man among the offspring of Aaron the priest, who has an immoral defect, shall be qualified to offer the Lord's offering by fire..."* (Lev. 21:22).

The punishment for profane behavior is potentially that all future generations have the rights of priesthood severed.

Today, there is no sacrificial system by which priests serve. But, the notion that one's spiritual inheritance can become abrogated by immoral behavior is taken very seriously by each Jew.

To be holy because God is holy is the command for all generations.

Our failure to experience holiness has potentially dire results not only for ourselves, but for all future generations.

Either good or evil acts cause eternal ripples throughout time.

Whether we be educated Jews—literate in Jewish ritual or not—we nevertheless cannot fail in our moral obligations.

It is the task of the Jew to live a holy life because God is holy. The ability of our People to survive and thrive rests primarily upon this moral command.

Shabbat Shalom,

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